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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the two main schools of thought concerning the structure of Black English and its relationship to other dialects. One approach is that of the social dialectologists who claim that Black English shares features and origins of white non-standard Southern speech; the frequency with which specific features occur in actual speech constitutes the dialect differences. On the other side, the Creolists contend that Black English can be traced to pidgin and creole-based systems originating in coastal West African languages; the deep structural differences in Black English represent underlying vestiges of its West African origin. These two viewpoints are considered in their analysis of the verb system of Black English, specifically with respect to the verb "be" and to verb agreement and aspect. The social and educational implications of these theories are also discussed. (VM)

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BLACK ENGLISH: TWO VIEWPOINTS

by

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ABSTRACT

BLACK ENGLISH: TWO VIEWPOINTS

This paper examines Black English as a social dialect, a cohesive language system in its own right, from the viewpoint of current linguistic theories concerning its history, description and relationship to other dialects of English. Virtually ignored by the Linguistic Atlas of the United States, Black English has been intensively examined since the 1960's by such sociolinguists as Labov, Wolfram, Fasold, Shuy, Stewart, Bailey and Dillard. Their research has established important findings concerning the systematic differences between Black English and Standard English, and has provided insights into the functional role of this dialect within its cultural matrix. However, differences in theoretical biases and methodological approaches exist among these linguists. They can be grouped, roughly, in two positions in their assessment of Black English: (1) that it shares the features and British origins of white non-standard Southern speech; (2) that it can be traced to pidgin and creole-based systems originating in coastal West African languages. Both positions are explored in the light of the grammatical structure of this dialect.

Labov's leadership of the first group is manifested by his pioneering studies which quantify linguistic variables correlating with social factors of class, race, speech styles, age and sex. This methodology shores up his thesis that differences between black and white dialects of English are superficial, low-level processes; the essential difference is the frequency with which specific features occur in actual speech.

The second group, the Creolists, posit deep structural differences in Black English which represent underlying vestiges of its West African linguistic origin. They present comparative evidence of linguistic forms which attest to this origin in many features of Black English, and maintain that West African Pidgin English was the early language of the slaves brought to the American colonies. The subsequent linguistic history of pidgin. → creole. → decreolization (with overlapping stages, diachronically and synchronically) within a framework of social stratification among the slaves accounts for the range of forms in the dialect and the features shared with other dialects of English.

Although linguists do not offer a monolithic approach concerning the nature of Black English, they agree that it exists as a well-formed

system, and that educators should consider language differences not deficiencies, in formulating instructional strategies for black disadvantaged children.

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BLACK ENGLISH: TWO VIEWPOINTS

It is only within the last few years that Black English has been recognized as a social dialect, a cohesive linguistic system in its own right. Until the last decade, this dialect has been neglected, or misconstrued in major studies of American English. The study of Black English has its roots in the social and political issues resulting from the heavy migration of blacks to many northern cities. An awareness of these issues is manifested in the recent proliferation of sociolinguistic studies, beginning in the 1960's.

Black English is a social dialect spoken by most blacks of the lower socio-economic class. It shares many features with other dialects of English, but there are features of pronunciation and grammar which occur only in Black English; linguistic forms which are systematically different from other dialects. It is the totality of these features, shared and unshared, that constitutes the linguistic system of Black English. Although there <u>are</u> blacks whose speech has few or none of these distinctive characteristics, there are few speakers of this dialect who are <u>not</u> black. (Wolfram, 1970)

Although there is considerable agreement among sociolinguists as to the systematic differences of Black English, there are differences among them with respect to theory, to methods of description, and especially with respect to the significance of these differences in the relationship of Black English to white dialects. One can group these sociolinguists, more or less, into two camps: the social dialectologists, and the creolists. (Baratz, 1973) The focus of this paper is the theoretical bases of these two viewpoints on the structure

of Black English and its relationship to other dialects of English.

THE SOCIAL DIALECTOLOGISTS

The major sociolinguistic studies which characterize this group are the New York study by Labov (1968), the Detroit study by Wolfram (1969), and the Washington,D.C. report by Shuy, Wolfram and Riley (1968). The focus of these linguists, spearheaded by Labov, is on variation within language, and the measurement of variability as correlated with social factors. They feel that previous linguistic studies of urban speech failed both to deal with the complexity of variation in any systematic way, and to elicit data from informants in natural speech situations. In the main, these linguists, whose orientation is that of Chomskian generative theory, believe that the dialects of a single language share the same set of base and transformational rules, and that differences in these dialects may be accounted for by minor differences in low-level rules, or in the ordering of such rules.

In their view, Black English differs only superficially from white dialects of English, and these differences can be interpreted by the frequency with which specific features occur in actual speech. The quantification of sociolinguistic behavior is Labov's major contribution to their research. In his pioneering work, The Social Stratification of English in New York City (1966), Labov formulated the concept of the linguistic variable as a quantifiable marker of social status. The variable can be viewed as a function of its systematic correlation with such factors as socio-economic class, age, ethnic group, and contextual speech styles, and also in relation to its linguistic environment, e.g., with respect to preceding or

(Wolfram, 1969b:250)

following elements. Labov's frequency rules are stated in terms of the percentages of actual occurrences within the total number of potential occurrences, and this quantitative data of variable behavior is incorporated into formal expressions of ordered rules. (Labov,1969a)

In his study of the copula and auxiliary be in the speech of black adolescent groups in Harlem, Labov finds "abundant confirmation of Chomsky's general position that dialects of English are likely to differ from each other far more in their surface representations than in their underlying structures." (1969a: 761) This statement can be said to describe the viewpoint of the social dialectologists. Their position can be seen as a more sophisticated extension of older regional dialect studies which assumed a structural and historical affinity between black dialect and other American dialects, and "implicitly classified black non-standard speech as just another kind of American dialect." (Baratz, 1973:137) In brief, the social dialectologists interpret Black English as the"transformation of a regional dialect into a class and ethnic pattern." (Wolfram, 1969a:17)

THE CREOLISTS

The creolists, representated by Dillard, Stewart and Taylor, interpret the systematic differences between Black English and white dialects not as superficial, but as deep structural differences affecting meaning, and which reflect the divergent linguistic origin and history of the black dialect. These differences are not quantitative, but qualitative. Stewart and Dillard present historical and comparative evidence to attest that Black English has its roots in the contact situation between West African languages and English, and that it can be traced to a creolized version of pidgin English.

According to the creolization theory, the slaves brought to the New World from coastal West African countries first mastered a contact variety of English, a pidgin language. (A pidgin is a special variety of lingua franca which is not the native language of its speakers. The vocabulary and grammar of the pidgin is molded by the phonology and syntax of the underlying native language, and its morphological structure is reduced.) As Herskovits stated in his seminal work, The Myth of the Negro Past:

> Since grammar and idiom are the last aspects of a new language to be learned, the Negroes who reached the New World acquired as much of the vocabulary of their masters as they initially needed or was later taught to them, pronounced these words as best they were able, but organized them into their aboriginal speech patterns. Those arose the various forms of Negro-English, Negro-French, Negro-Spanish, and Negro-Portuguese spoken in the New World, their peculiarities being due to the fact that they comprise European words cast into an African grammatical mold. But this emphatically does not imply that these dialects are without grammar, or that they represent an inability to master the foreign tongue, as is so often claimed. (1941:280)

In tracing the history of Black English, the creolists have formulated a sequential schema of pidgin - - creole - - decreolization. The pidgin language became creolized when it became the mother tongue of slaves born in America. (It need hardly be said that a creole language is a fully-formed grammatical system.) One of the evidences of this stage is found in present-day Gullah, a dialect spoken by blacks on the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina, and which was descriged by Turner in the 1940's.

Dillard cites literary and documentary sources to attest that the Pidgin English of the slaves was as widespread in the northern colonies as in the South, and "that by the end of the 18th century, slaves from Massachusetts to South Carolina used varieties of English ranging from West African Pidgin to(nearly)Standard English." (1972:93)

Dillard points to the records of the West India Company in Manhattan to show that New York City at the end of the 17th century had a larger percentage of slaves than did Virginia; a fact which refutes what he calls the "convenient fiction that black slaves came only to the South and lost all traces of a prior linguistic system." (1973)

It is implicit in this history that status differences which existed among blacks, e.g. social stratification of house servants and field hands, contributed to the range of creolization among speakers of the dialect. And since newcomers from Africa spoke Pidgin English, several varieties of pidgin and creolized English co-existed in time. (Dillard, 1972) Moreover, all languages change within time, so that it would be simplistic to view the evolution of this dialect without acknowledging the simultaneous processes of synchronic variation and diachronic change. (The intersection of these dimensions on a time/space continuum can be systematized into a model and theory of language change.)

The process of decreolization in this country, beginning after the Civil War, saw the gradual modification of creole features of the Negro speech in the direction of the local white dialects. Stewart describes this process as "neither instantaneous nor uniform":

> Indeed, the nonstandard speech of present-day Negroes still seems to exhibit structural traces of a creole predecessor, and this is probably a reason why it is in some ways more deviant from standard English than is the nonstandard speech of even the most uneducated whites. (1967:12)

FEATURES OF BLACK ENGLISH

The linguists of both groups agree that the distinctiveness of Black English lies primarily in its syntax, especially in the verb system. The differences are most striking in the treatment of the

verb to be, and in the system of tense. Since the critical issue between the two positions is the assessment of these features, the contrasting interpretations will be examined.

I. Copula

Black English	Standard English
They out walkin'	They're out walking.
She sick.	She's sick.

The zero copula is characteristic of Black English. Labov's analysis of variable copula behavior in that dialect is based on his Harlem data. Utilizing the techniques of generative grammar and a quantitative analysis, he formulated a general principle:

> Wherever Standard English can contract, NNE [Negro Non-Standard English] can delete is and are, and vice versa; and wherever SE cannot contract, NNE cannot delete is and are, and vice versa. (1969a:722)

Therefore, we can have She is sick. . She's sick. . She sick, but not * He's not as smart as he thinks he's, or * He's not as smart as he thinks he.

Wolfram's research concurs with Labov's analysis and interpretation. Wolfram points out the importance of separating the categorical positions (in which the copula cannot be deleted) from those in which the copula is optionally variant; "failure to distinguish these environments would skew the figures of systematic variation." (1969a:166)

The Creolists do not accept Labov's analysis of copula behavior. They feel that his treatment of the zero copula in Black English as merely an extension of Standard English contraction fails to deal with the radical differences in the tense and aspect system of Black English. Creolists maintain that verbs in Black English are marked for the ongoing, continuing, or intermittent quality of an action rather than for the time of its occurrence. The significant

difference between Black English and Standard English is that in the former, aspect is an obligatory category and tense is optional; whereas in the latter, tense is obligatory and aspect is optional. (Dillard, 1972:72) Stewart asserts that a Black English sentence like He workin' is not an exact grammatical equivalent of Standard English He is working. In Black English, He workin' indicates immediate action, in contrast to He be workin' which indicates repetitive or extended action. The negative forms of these sentences, My brother ain't workin' v. My brother don' be workin' , makes the contrast between the two categories even clearer. (1969b:243) The invariant (or 'durative' be), indicating an habitual aspect or repetitive event distributed intermittently in time, has no equivalent in Standard English.

Creolists have pointed to this systematic contrast in Black English between the invariant be and zero copula as the most obvious and distinctive difference between the two dialects. The zero copula and the habitual aspect of be mark the affinity of Black English with creole languages, and are vestiges of its West African origins. These features have correspondances in the verb system of Niger-Congo languages, which differentiate between an aspect of habitual action and an aspect of completion. Similarities in structure and idiom among black creole languages formed during the West African encounter with European maritime powers have been noted by the Creolists; they have charted the correspondances, especially in the verb system, in Liberian Pidgin English, WesKos Pidgin, Jamaican Creole, Sranan Tongo (the English creole of Surinam), and the parallels in French and Portuguese creoles.

The following examples from creole languages and West African Pidgin English suggest parallels to Black English:

Jamaican Creole (Bailey,1964:108)

a. di biebi ogli 'The baby is ugly' (zero copula before pred. adj.)
b. di biebi a gyal 'The baby is a girl' (a before pred. nominatives)
c. di biebi (de) anda trii 'The baby is under the tree' (de optional before locative phrases)

Gullah (Stewart,1969b:244)

a. I de (da) go. 'I go/ I went'
b. Dem da fish. 'They are fish' (da before pred. nouns)
c. Dem fishin' 'They are fishing'(zero copula before prog. verb)

West African Pidgin English (Anshen, 1970)

a. /yan i bi tičə/ 'John is a teacher' (bi before predicate nominative)
b. /yan de sing/ 'John is singing' (de before prog. verb form)
c. /yan tɔl/ 'John is tall' (zero copula before pred. adj.)

The copula is obligatory (cf Labov's 'categorical rule') in the following positions:

d. /yan go bi tičə/ 'John will be a teacher'
e. /yan no klɛvə layk i tink i bi/ 'John is not as smart as he thinks he is'

Stewart (in Dillard, 1972) documents that invariant be appeared as an innovation in American Black English around 1792, representing an earlier de or da. In early Gullah, dem da fish (with copula) contrasts with dem fishin' (no copula). Stewart suggests that the statistical discrepancies which turned up in Labov's data, namely, that the zero copula occured more frequently before verb phrases than before noun phrases (see Labov, 1969a:731ff) reflects this earlier historical distinction in grammatical markers. These markers subsequently merged, and now give the appearance of variability in Black English speech. (Stewart, 1969b:244)

In an attempt to support the position of the socio-dialectologists, Fasold constructed an interesting elicitation experiment on the hypothesis that occurrences of invariant _be_ are explainable as the result of deleted _will_ or _would_. The test sentences were designed so that the informant had to respond in an abbreviated form, using a modal, e.g. 'will be happy', or 'would be itching', etc. The results included responses of other modals, inappropriately used, and the distinctive _do be_ construction, as in _do be itching_, _do be up there_. Fasold concluded that all occurrences of invariant _be_ cannot be explained as the phonological deletion of a modal. He suggests that _be_ can be accounted for by recognizing tense as optional in copula constructions of Black English. He argues that the best analysis is one which recognizes only one verb _to be_, which can occur without tense. (1969a)

Fasold's discussion of this experiment perhaps best expresses the theoretical differences between the two groups of linguists:

> What one decides in a case like this depends on his concept of the status of Black English in contact with Standard English. If one considers Black English and Standard English, for some individual, to be partly parallel but completely separate grammars, then the code-switching theory is appropriate. If, as seems more reasonable to me, one assumes that the individual uses languages on the basis of a single grammar which shares many rules with Standard English, lacks others, and has still others which the standard dialect lacks, then code-switching is not necessary to explain the two types of _be_. (1969a: 773)

Fasold has elegantly stated the case: the creolists see Black English and Standard English as separate grammars, with black dialect speakers borrowing Standard English forms (or code-switching); the social dialectologists see Black English as a variety of English with several structural rules not mutually shared with other dialects.

II VERB AGREEMENT

Black English	Standard English
He walk.	He walks.
He do that.	He does that.
He have a bike.	He has a bike.

Fasold and Wolfram explain the lack of the suffix -s in 3rd singular present indicative on the basis that "this suffix is simply not part of the grammar of the dialect," and conclude that this makes the paradigm 'more regular" in Black English. (1970:64)

But Dillard and Stewart argue that present tense functions differently in Black English; it is unmarked. Where present tense forms occur, they are 'borrowings', or code-switching, often manifested by such hypercorrections as 'they loves'. Dillard posits that the use of is in certain constructions is also a manifestation of code-switching as demonstrated in such sentences as They's home, I's sick, IM is sick, IM am sick, etc. (It should be noted that Dillard writes the form IM without an apostrophe to emphasize his claim that it is not the Standard English contraction of I am, but a Black English variant of the pronoun I.) (1972:54)

III COMPLETIVE ASPECT

Black English

I done go. I done gone.
He been done gone.

Another systematic difference in the verb structure of Black English is the completive aspect, marked by the verbs done and been, which have no equivalent functions in Standard English. The immediate completive is marked by done, as in I done go; the remote completive is marked by been, as in 'I been had it there a long time.

Fasold and Wolfram interpret this perfective aspect in Black English as two extra distinctions not shared by Standard English. (1970:62) The done constructions also occur in white non-standard dialects, as in 'I done ate my supper', whereas the been constructions occur only in Black English.

The Creolists document the use of these markers of completive aspect in other English pidgins and creoles. See the following examples from West African Pidgin English.

Past	i bin go	'he went'	
Past completive	i don chop	'he has eaten'	
Past continuative	i bin de chop	'he was eating'	(habitual)
Perfective	i don chop	'he has eaten'	(completed)
Past perfective	i bin don chop	'he had eaten'	

There are two aspect markers which occur before the verb: de - continuing or habitual action, and don - completed action; bin is the past tense marker. (Brewer, 1970)

IV HAVE: PRESENT PERFECT TENSE

The rare use in Black English of forms of have as auxiliary in the present perfect tense have been noted by the linguists in both groups.

Black English	Standard English
He taken it.	He has taken it.

Labov himself raises the question of whether this lack is a synchronic fact of Black English grammar, or a function of phonological processes of deletion. He argues that a phonological process would not only account for this lack, but would also explain other pronunciation differences, such as the absence of the suffix -s in 3rd singular

and the possessive, and the difference in phonetic form between Black English possessive pronouns and their Standard English equivalents, e.g. they book instead of their book. Labov suggests that due to a weakening or disappearance of final /r/, the phonetic form of their as been re-analyzed as they, a phonological process which might also explain the rarity of the plural copula are. (1969a:755-56)

Fasold and Wolfram agree with Labov's analysis - that the ommission of forms of have can be explained by a pronunciation rule. They state that although both the past and the perfect tense are present in Black English, they are not sure that there are past participles in that dialect, for the pfeterite and the past perfect are often merged by a generalized form which serves both functions: e.g., He taken it , He have taken it. (1970:62)

The Creolists maintain that the auxiliary have is not part of the Black English verb system. It is not clear whether there is a preterite versus a perfective distinction in Black English, but the uses of have/has auxiliaries are borrowings from Standard English, as demonstrated by the inappropriate manipulation of forms in

He have done it. He have did it.

They point out that the Black English forms done and been come closest to the perfective function of have in Standard English, and it is this resemblance, claims Dillard, which "made it possible for white Southern speakers to borrow done in constructions like have/has done gone." (1972:48) And in rebuttal to Labov's theory that the Black English possessive pronoun they is a re-analysis of their because of the disappearance of final /r/, Stewart shows that "possessive pronoun forms such as me, he, she, we (or we-all), y'all and dem occur frequently in Negro dialect." (1969c:210)

ACROLECT - BASILECT

The Creolists maintain that speech patterns in present-day Black English show structural traces of the underlying creole ranging in a continuum from the top, 'acrolect' (nearest to Standard English), to the bottom, 'basilect' (nearest to the creole substratum). Stewart describes the black speech patterns in Washington, D.C. as illustrative of this continuum. (1964). Of particular interest to Stewart in relation to basilect features is the phenomenon of age-grading. Young children rather than adults use a preponderance of basilect forms. This cannot be ascribed to primary language acquisition (for 7 year olds have passed that stage), nor to imitation of parents, but rather to stages of language behavior - like teen-age slang - practiced by peer-groups in most cultures. It is not universal, but where it occurs in black speech communities, the character of age-graded speech is distinguished by certain archaic features, several of which disappear as the child reaches adolescence. Some of the features include such creole characteristics as

(1) the pronoun undifferentiated for gender or case: (Dillard,1972:57)

'Me help you?' 'Her paintin' wif a spoon' 'He a nice little girl'

(2) possession indicated by juxtaposition:

'Mary hat'

Very prevalent among young children is the form IMA for 'I'm gonna'. Dillard describes the transitional stages of this form in the speech of children between the ages of 5 to 14 as IM put. . Ima put. . Imonna put. . I'm gonna put. (1972:234) He theorizes that the a of Ima is likely to be a"historical survival related to a continuative particle á (a variant of de - see above) which turns up in many of the English creoles." (236) Other basilect features which may persist

are the verb completives, done and been. There is a complex interaction of age-grading, sex-grading and peer-group pressure which influence the distribution of many grammatical features, and which have important implications for teaching Standard English in the schools.

SOCIAL RELEVANCE

Much of the research of Labov, Fasold, Shuy and Wolfram has been to determine the precise nature of the pronunciation and grammatical differences between black and white dialects. They have paid much attention to consonant cluster reduction, and have constructed rigorous variable rules to account for this behavior; i.e. mis' for mist, hol' for hold, etc. They emphasize the fact that Standard English speakers also simplify final clusters, but the distinction is that Standard English speakers do so only when the following word begins with a consonant, as in roas' beef, whereas Black English speakers also omit the final stop before a vowel, as in wes' end. (see Shuy and Fasold, 1971:191 ff, and Fasold and Wolfram, 1970:44-46)

The application of these sociolinguistic principles to educational problems is strongly emphasized by these linguists. They have expressed their convictions that linguistic knowledge should be socially relevant; that it be used to help teachers who have been misguided by superficial and dangerous assumptions put forth by educational psychologists about verbal deprivation of disadvantaged black children.

On the issue of social relevance, the Creolists are in agreement with the social dialectologists. They are equally aware of variation in non-standard speech, and are equally sensitive to existing social and educational problems. Stewart has written extensively

on pedagogical strategies in teaching English and reading to speakers of non-standard dialects, and he has stressed the importance of respecting the integrity of the child's dialect in a bi-dialectal teaching program. (1969c)

THE CONTROVERSY

But there remains the divergence in linguistic and historical assessment of Black English between the two groups. Labov, Shuy et al see Black English as regional and social in origin. Labov has written:

> Historically speaking, the Negro speech pattern that we are dealing with in northern cities is a regional speech pattern. We might stop speaking of Negro speech, and begin using the term 'Southern regional speech', if that would make the political and social situation more manageable. . . we are witnessing the transformation of a regional speech pattern into a class and ethnic pattern in the northern cities. (1969b:34-36)

Stewart and Dillard strongly disagree that region and social segregation account for the origin and qualitative structural differences of Black English.

> This means that any distinctive characteristics of Negro speech have their origin in linguistic history rather than oppression, and represent normal language differences rather than the direct effects of poverty, ignorance or genetic inferiority. (Stewart, 1969b:241)

Dillard rejects, with no little sarcasm, Labov's implication that "language variation is really originally geographic and becomes social when a blight like the city falls on the land." (1973) He criticizes the "Establishment tradition" of American dialect geography, claiming that the exclusive geographic orientation of the Linguistic Atlas stems from 19th century Germanic dialectology. It is that tradition, reflected in the Atlas, which points to the British dialects as the ancestors of American dialects and explains away distinctive Negro speech as archaic features of earlier dialects of East Anglia, Anglo-

Irish, or Scotch. (1973) In support of their position, the Creolists point out that Negro dialects are more alike - homogeneous- throughout the country, while different in many ways from the non-standard dialects of whites living in the same area, and their citations attest the similarities between the dialect in plantation literature and present inner-city speech.

The debate between these two groups of linguists hinges on the historical issue, as it affects deep structural versus surface differences. Stewart and Dillard are quite critical of what they consider a lack of historical perspective by other scholars. Moreover, Stewart resents the "blatant intrusion of socio-political issues into the scientific study of Negro speech," and claims that our Anglocentric tradition and social Darwinism have symbiotically fused to accomodate two contradictory views: the equality of non-European peoples and the inferiority of non-European cultures. This blend of Americanism and racism affects the linguistic and pedagogical views of Black English; thus Stewart sees the denial of any black-white speech differences as a reaction to politically embarrassing statements of racial behavior. (1969a). He implies that the social dialectologists, using Chomskian terminology to explain the 'superficial' dialect differences, are essentially expressing their concern for the self-respect of the blacks:

> Although the linguistic alternatives are never evaluated in political terms, public assertions that only surface-structure differences exist between Negro dialects and standard English are often made (and accepted) with all the conviction and prior commitment of public assertions of the Negro's right in American society. . . .asserting publicly that American Negroes have the same linguistic deep structure as American whites may merely be a way of declaring one's acceptance of the Negro as an equal. But what if, in fact, Negro dialect does exhibit certain deep-structure differences from standard English, and even from white non-standard speech? Does this mean that Negores are intellectually, socially and politically unequal to whites? (1969b:211-12)

Stewart makes a strong case for his claim that "the speech of American Negroes never was identical to that of American whites. . . that the Chomskian assumption. . may not necessarily apply to the differences between Negro dialects and white dialects." (1969b:241-2) Yet this does not imply a rejection of the application of generative grammar to dialect differences; using the techniques of generative theory to construct a grammar of Black English, Marvin Loflin states in The English Journal:

> .. . efforts to construct a grammar for Nonstandard Negro English suggest that the similarities between it and Standard English are superficial. There is every reason, at this stage of research, to believe that a fuller description of Nonstandard Negro English will show a grammatical system which must be treated as a foreign language. (1967, 56:1312)

In Labov's recent studies, there is an indication of some wavering and contradiction in his position. In his 1972 paper on "Negative Attraction and Negative Concord in English Grammar," he equivocates:

> In some ways, Black English is converging with other dialects of English, and reflects a Creole origin with structures more different from English than we now observe. But so far as the rules of negative concord. . are concerned, we are looking at the further development of traditional, well-established English rules with no reflection in Creole structures. (774)

His inconsistency is evident in his dealing with the probable Creole origins of Black English, and at the same time grouping black and white dialects together under a common historical source. This ambiguous presentation which seemingly undermines his rationale of a single grammatical model enables him to straddle both sides of the political issue of Black English. This approach of "the-same-as-even-if-different" has been described by Baratz as a treatment which allows Labov

> at one and the same time to embrace Chomsky, the linguistic guru, to symbolically declare that blacks and whites are the same, and yet to declare for black awareness and black identity. Indeed, Labov's avoidance of discussing deep-seated differences

> conforms to the accepted and expected socio-political framework of today's social scientists. (1973: 137)

Despite their divergent theoretical positions, both groups of linguists are dedicated to the goal of dispelling current misconceptions connected with the linguistic functioning of Black English. It is in no way an impoverished language system, nor are the verbal or cognitive abilities of its speakers deficient in any sense. The highly verbal skills of black speakers are demonstrated in such fluent, artful language games as sounding, signifying, rapping, playing the dozens, etc. The idiom of this art must be understood within its cultural context. Teachers should be made aware of language differences, not deficiences, in formulating reading and language arts programs, for perhaps the most disadvantaged individuals are those educators who have not understood the social context of language behavior.

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